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TENANCY IN THE SOUTHERN STATES ¹

SUMMARY

Number of farms and farm area of the South; size of farms in North and South, 482. — Value of the southern farm contrasted to that of the North; value of equipment, 483. — Tenancy conditions affected by the negro, 484. — Terminology on tenancy different in South from that in the North, 485. — Percentage of tenancy by States, 1880-1910; tenancy and colored farmers predominate in the cotton belt, 486. — Negroes gain over white farmers in possession of farms, 487. — Changes in proportion of cash and share tenancy; cash and share tenancy in relation to intensivity of cultivation, 488. — Tenancy and its relation to value of land, 490. — Relations to character of crops, to amount of live stock, to value of buildings, 491. — The negro tenant in the white districts, 492. — The "Renters' Union of America," 494. — Length of lease, 495. — Forces which will counteract tenancy, 496.

To the south of Mason and Dixon's line are sixteen states which constitute that portion of the Union familiarly referred to as the South. Here are, then, one-third of the states of the country. In area these states fall a little short of a third of the total area, and also a little short of a third of the area of improved land. But in the number of farms the proportion is high, being 49 per cent of the total number of farms of the United States. This means that the average size of farms in the South is much smaller than in the North.² Before the war the reverse of this was true, but at the present time the average size of the southern

¹ This paper completes the series by the present writer on Tenancy in the United States. The other papers, published in previous issues of this Journal, have been: "Tenancy in the North Central States" (August, 1911); "Tenancy in the North Atlantic States" (November, 1911); "Tenancy in the Western States" (February, 1912).

² By the "North," the North Atlantic, Middle Atlantic, and North Central States are meant.

farm is 114 acres, while the average of the northern farm is 143 acres. During the past decade the average size of farms in the North has increased 10 acres, while in the South it has decreased 24 acres. This decrease is the result of cutting plantations up into smaller farms, which in a very great many cases means tenant farms. A similar movement toward smaller farms in Texas and Oklahoma does not mean so frequently an increase in tenancy, since a considerable immigration from other states brings in a large number of land-owning farmers.

The value of the southern farm with its equipment is well below the average for the country, due partly to its smaller size, but also to the lower value of land per acre, the lower value of buildings, and the smaller equipment in the form of machinery and live stock. For example the average value of land in the South is above \$30 per acre in but two states, while in five states it is below \$15 per acre. In the North Central States, in which is the greatest body of farm land in the country, we find in contrast but one state in which the average value is below \$30, while the upper limit is almost \$95 for Illinois. The average for the South is \$16.72, for the North \$46.26. In buildings the contrast is still greater, the average value of buildings for each acre being in the North \$10.93, in the South \$4.03. In implements and machinery the North has an investment per acre two and one-half times as great as has the South; in live stock an investment about twice as great. All told a northern farm with its equipment is valued at \$9500; a southern farm at \$2900. It is to be noted, however, that the recent gains in value are more rapid in the South, standing 110.1 per cent during the past decade for the South, and 90.1 per cent for the North.

Thus it is plain that the farm of the North represents a much higher investment than does the farm of the South. It has been shown in the previous articles of this series that with comparatively few exceptions, a high rate of tenancy is found in connection with land high in price, and a low rate where land is low in price. Since land is decidedly higher in price in the North than in the South, and since the rate of tenancy in the South is nevertheless nearly twice as great as in the North, there must be some influence at work other than the value of land. But it was also shown in the articles above referred to that a considerable number of forces were at work in determining the proportion of tenancy; only if other things are equal, do the value of land and the rate of tenancy appear to bear a close relationship. In the South the greatest factor in the tenancy problem is the negro, and in proportion to the numbers of negroes the rate of tenancy rises and falls. Along with this primary factor, however, the other factors seem to bring about in the South the same relative results as in the North.

The war left the southern planter with no reliable farm labor. The negroes were at hand, but authority could no longer be exercised over them, and the payment of wages proved to be too weak in its appeal to induce them to refill the places which they had just vacated. The economic reconstruction of the South involved the development of a system of farming for which there were no precedents, at least none in America; for it meant the use, in some manner, of a million farm hands to be employed in a way to which they were not accustomed. It meant that half a million planters who had lost most of their property were compelled, as the possessors of the plantations, to make a bargain with the freedmen on such terms

that both parties would find it tolerable to proceed with the work of tilling the soil. Information on the early experiments is meager, but it is stated on good authority that the first attempt was on the basis of wages. This was not satisfactory and it became necessary to put responsibility of a more tangible sort upon the negro. The responsibility took the form of an interest in the crop. By this means it became possible to postpone his reward, in large part, to the time of harvest. In other words, the negro became a tenant of the planter; but not a tenant in the same sense as that implied by the term in the North.

The terminology relating to tenancy in the South requires special attention. In the North we speak mainly of two classes of tenants, — cash and share. The same words are in use in the South, but by cash is meant not alone a money payment, but any form of fixed payment. For example cash rent in the cotton district ordinarily means the delivery at the end of the season of a specified quantity of cotton. Hence if the landlord receive fifty or one hundred pounds of cotton for each acre as the payment, he is secure so far as returns in cotton are concerned, tho he runs the risk of what it will be worth per pound. The tenant views the payment as cash in the sense that it is a stipulated fixed payment beyond which the whole remaining portion of the crop is his. Another form of cash rent is where a stipulated amount of labor is to be performed by the tenant under the direction of the landlord as agreed upon. These "cash" tenants, whether paying in money, in product, or in labor, are known as "renters," or "standing renters" in distinction from the "croppers" or the "halvers" who work the land on shares. The share tenants are of two main classes. First, those who furnish little or nothing in the way

of equipment and who get a proportionally smaller share of the crops, usually half. Second, those who furnish a considerable part of the equipment, usually including one or two mules, and who therefore receive a larger share, as two-thirds, or three-fourths, of the crop. There is a well-defined caste system among the tenants. The lowest class is represented by those who furnish little equipment and receive half, or less, of the crop; above this comes the group whose independence is measured by the possession of a mule and a plow and the means of subsistence till harvest time; the highest class consists of those who can be trusted to deliver a certain quantity of crop or possibly a sum of money, and who are by that fact emancipated in the main from the directing authority of the landlord.

The percentages of tenancy for each of the sixteen southern states for the past four census dates are shown in the table:—

PER CENT OF TENANCY, 1880-1910

	1910	1900	1890	1880
Delaware	41.9	50.3	46.9	42.4
Maryland	29.5	33.6	31.0	30.9
Virginia	26.5	30.7	26.9	29.5
West Virginia	20.5	21.8	17.7	19.1
North Carolina	42.3	41.4	34.1	33.5
South Carolina	63.0	61.1	55.3	50.3
Georgia	65.6	59.9	53.6	44.9
Florida	26.7	26.5	23.6	30.9
Kentucky	33.9	32.8	25.0	26.5
Tennessee	41.1	40.6	30.8	34.5
Alabama	60.2	57.7	48.6	46.8
Mississippi	66.1	62.4	52.8	43.8
Arkansas	50.0	45.4	32.1	30.9
Louisiana	55.3	58.0	44.4	35.2
Oklahoma	54.8	43.8		
Texas	52.6	49.7	41.9	37.6

It will be noticed that there has been for the thirty year period an increase in tenancy in all but four states,

Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Florida. Likewise in Kentucky, and Tennessee there has been no pronounced increase in the proportion of tenancy during the period. During the past decade, there has been in the four states furthest north (Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia) a decided decrease in the proportion of tenancy. These four states thus have come to be in a class with the North Atlantic states, so far as changes in this regard are concerned. As in the North Atlantic states, the character of the farming is miscellaneous; there are many fruit and vegetable farms; the land is not extremely high in price; withal it does not lend itself especially well to a landlord-tenant system. It is to the south of these states that tenancy is high. Between Virginia and the great cotton-growing states lie North Carolina and Tennessee, both of which have, for the South, but a moderate amount of tenancy. Beyond, there are four with upwards of 60 per cent of their farms in the hands of tenants, and four more, all to the west of the Mississippi, with over half of their farms rented. Taking this row of states from South Carolina to Texas, with Arkansas and Oklahoma to the north, about three farms out of every five are operated by tenants, — a proportion far beyond that of any other group of states in the country.

In the same group of states is to be found the great proportion of the colored farmers. That the negro farmers are, in the majority of cases, tenants, is a matter of common information. That they are gaining in land ownership, while the white farmers are losing, may not be so generally known. Such, however, is the case. Unfortunately the Census Bureau did not collect farm data concerning the colored race as such until 1900, thus giving but one decade on which to

base comparisons. The fact, nevertheless, of so much land ownership by the negroes in 1900 is conclusive proof of great, even rapid, advancement in this respect; since but thirty-five years earlier they had owned substantially no land.

The main facts of ownership and tenancy of both white and colored farmers for 1900 and 1910 are as follows:—

NUMBER OF OWNED AND OF RENTED FARMS IN THE
SOUTH, 1910 AND 1900

Owned farms.	1910.....	1,554,687
	1900.....	1,387,094
	Per cent increase	12.1
Tenant farms.	1910.....	1,536,668
	1900.....	1,231,028
	Per cent increase	24.8

FARMS OPERATED BY WHITE FARMERS

	Total	Owners	Tenants	
			Cash	Share
1910 ...	2,207,167	1,336,690	227,517	638,696
1900 ...	1,879,489	1,199,832	186,985	491,652
Per cent increase.	17.4	11.4	21.6	29.9

FARMS OPERATED BY COLORED FARMERS

	Total	Owners	Tenants	
			Cash	Share
1910	890,163	218,997	285,931	384,638
1900	740,653	188,262	271,692	280,699
Per cent increase	20.2	16.3	5.2	37

PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF FARMS BY COLOR AND TENURE

WHITE FARMERS					COLORED FARMERS			
Year	Total	Owners	Tenants		Total	Owners	Tenants	
			Cash	Share			Cash	Share
1910	100	60.5	10.3	29.2	100	24.5	32.1	43.4
1900	100	63.8	10.1	26.1	100	25.4	36.6	38.0

It will be seen that the negroes have gained possession of farms at an appreciably more rapid rate than have the white farmers. Worthy of special mention is the fact that the increase in the number of farms owned by negroes has been about 50 per cent greater than the increase in farms owned by white people. The increase in tenant farms has been greater for both races than the increase in owned farms; but again the colored race makes the better showing. In 1900, 74.5 per cent of the colored farmers were tenants; in 1910 the percentage was 75.3. Of the white farmers 36.1 per cent were tenants in 1900; while the percentage was 39.2 in 1910.

The proportion of cash and share tenancy has changed materially during the past census decade. For the two decades preceding cash tenancy increased more rapidly than share tenancy; during the 1900-10 decade the proportion of share tenancy made a considerable gain, while that of cash tenancy decreased. Among white tenants the change was not pronounced, but among colored tenants it was. In 1900 out of every 100 negro tenants 51 rented on shares, while 57 rented on that basis in 1910.¹

For some years a principle in agricultural economics which has received prominent attention is the theory of cash and share rent in relation to the intensivity of cultivation. It is proved that a cash tenant will cultivate more thoroughly, — on the basis, of course, of similar conditions. The situation in the South is such that the principle seems to be contradicted. For example, in the South Atlantic States the share tenants grow four bushels more of corn per acre than do cash

¹ Mr. R. P. Brooks, in an excellent article in the *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 26, makes the statement that the cash tenancy system is on the increase in Georgia. This was true from 1880 to 1900. For the last decade the proportion of cash tenancy decreased a little.

tenants, while in the North the cash tenants conform to the doctrine of the economists and produce appreciably more than the share tenants. In cotton yields the case is unmistakeable; the share tenant produces more than the cash tenant. The explanation is not far to seek. In the North the tenant follows largely his own plans and impulses. In the South the share tenant is supervised minutely, doing the farm work as prescribed by the landlord, while the cash tenant is left much more to his own devices. Hence the share tenant does better farming than his own judgment would prompt him to do; the cash tenant does poorer farming than his best economic interests would suggest.

The relation of the value of land to tenancy in the South, as elsewhere, is a vital one. It may be viewed in two ways: first, that of the average value per acre of all owned land as compared to the average value of all tenant land. The second viewpoint is that of counties in which land is high in price in comparison with counties in which the price is low. It is by counties rather than by states that conditions sufficiently similar to be comparable are found. In state after state, the land held by the tenants is higher in price, usually much higher, than is the owned land. The difference in the leading cotton states in this respect is from 16 per cent in South Carolina to 60 per cent in Texas. In Virginia, where there are many kinds of agricultural undertakings in evidence, but with no one crop by which a great portion of the farm area can be exploited, and where ownership is increasing, the value of owned land is above that of tenant land by about 10 per cent. In Florida also the situation is reversed, owing to the high values of fruit and truck farms, which are mainly operated by owners.

The above comparison is made by taking the owned and the tenant land, with no regard as to the district in which it may lie. Quite another viewpoint is gained by selecting a considerable area within which comparatively good land predominates, and a similar area where cheap land predominates. Comparisons as to tenure may then be tried. No results appreciably different, however, are obtained. The conclusion is that the same forces are at work whether the farms high in price are intermingled with those low in price, or whether they are separated. In the ten counties having the highest priced land of Georgia the percentage of tenancy is 71.3 as compared to 65.6 per cent for the state. In Texas, the ten counties with land highest in price show 63.3 per cent of tenancy as compared to 52.6 per cent for the state. In North Carolina 50 per cent against 42.3. The counties with the low prices of land are in nearly all cases below the average in tenancy. The exceptions to this general rule are, as appears elsewhere, the instances of special crop production, such as fruit, where the land is above the average in value, but where tenants are relatively few.

The relation of tenancy to the character of the crop grown is close. Here as elsewhere the tenant grows mainly the money crops which can be planted and harvested within a single season. The most conspicuous of such crops in the South is cotton, 60 per cent of which is grown by the tenants. Tobacco is another crop popular among tenants, altho they produce only about their proportional share. The great contrast between the farming done by tenants and that done by owners is seen in the figures for live stock, the crops fed to live stock, and in the value of buildings and machinery. The situation is about the same through-

out. The tenant grows much less than his proportional share of corn and oats, and about half his proportional share of hay and other forage crops, and he owns less than half his proportion of the live stock.

In buildings the tenant is still further short, having hardly more than one-fourth the value of such equipment as is found on the farms of owners. In machinery the proportion is not quite so low as in buildings. In the North the tenant farm does not differ greatly from the owned farm in size, while in the South it is decidedly smaller. In the cotton states the tenant farm is but about one-third as large as the owned farm; in the other southern states approximately half as large. It is plain that the southern tenant has under his charge very much less property than has the northern tenant. In the North the tenant manages not far from nine thousand dollars' worth of land and equipment. In the South he has the management, with much less independence, of a farm with its equipment worth not over one-fifth as much. The northern tenant is substantially an independent farmer; the southern tenant is not.

The Census Bureau in 1900 made a very interesting study of negro tenancy for selected counties, taking for certain states the fifteen counties with the largest proportion of colored farmers, and the fifteen counties with the smallest proportion. It was found that unmistakably the proportion of owned farms was higher where the negroes were few than where they were many. The conclusion was that "the negro, at least, makes the better progress the more closely he is associated with the white man and the more he is enabled to see in the example of the white man an incentive for becoming a landowner. Take away this example by segregating the colored man from the white, as in

the black belt of the South, repeat Haiti in a lesser degree, and some of the Haitian conditions are reproduced." ¹ A similar study of the 1910 data for four of these states, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas, fails to reveal a further development in the direction indicated by the investigation of 1900. In the blackest counties there was, it is true, a decrease in the percentage of negro owners, likewise of white owners. But unfortunately for the theory that negroes scattered among whites would be inspired to greater efforts and greater achievements, the negro owners under these conditions also decreased. They decreased at even a greater rate than in the black belt, as may be seen in the table: —

PER CENT OF FARMS OF SPECIFIED TENURES, OPERATED BY WHITE AND NEGRO FARMERS, 1910 AND 1900 IN SELECTED COUNTIES OF ALABAMA, GEORGIA, MISSISSIPPI, AND TEXAS

(a) *In 15 counties in each State with largest per cent of Negro Farmers*

State	Farms operated by white			Farms operated by negro	
	Date	Owners	Tenants	Owners	Tenants
Alabama	1910	59.2	40.8	8.8	91.2
	1900	61.2	38.8	8.5	91.5
Texas	1910	57.5	42.5	28.3	71.7
	1900	60.9	39.1	28.9	71.1
Georgia	1910	56.5	43.5	14.6	85.4
	1900	59.5	40.5	17.4	82.6
Mississippi . .	1910	50.2	49.8	7.2	92.8
	1900	58.7	41.3	8.1	91.9

(b) *In 15 counties in each state with smallest per cent of Negro Farmers*

Alabama	1910	59.2	40.8	32.2	67.8
	1900	64.8	35.2	39.2	60.8
Texas	1910	51.3	48.7	20.6	79.4
	1900	57.1	42.9	33.3	66.7
Georgia	1910	54.8	45.2	24.5	75.5
	1900	59.4	40.6	27.3	72.7
Mississippi . .	1910	61.7	38.3	31.7	68.3
	1900	70.0	30.0	38.6	61.4

¹ Twelfth Census, vol. v, p. xii.

On very few occasions have renters in any part of the United States acted in a concerted manner on economic problems. There have seldom been any recognized tenant issues. In the state of Texas, however, a little over a year ago an organization of tenants was formed for the purpose of bettering the conditions of renting land, and if possible, doing away with it. The organization is called the "Renters' Union of America." The resolutions passed at a meeting of this body savor strongly of single tax doctrine. This is interesting, especially in that it recognizes the undoubted fact that speculation and tenancy are intimately related. When men buy land with a view to sale at a higher figure within a comparatively few years, even tho the income in the form of rent be of secondary consideration, a large portion of such land will be for rent. Except in a new country it is seldom profitable to hold land out of use while waiting for a rise in price. Therefore, the land of the speculator is for rent, and in the larger share of instances such a landlord prefers to rent for cash, and worries very little about the welfare of the farm or of the tenant. Against these conditions the "Renters' Union of America" passed a series of long and drastic resolutions, among which was one favoring a tax "to the limit on all land held for speculation or exploitation." They declared that "use and occupancy" was the only just basis for title to land.

At the meeting in 1911, the Union took a stand against cash rent altogether and voted that share rent should not exceed one-third of the crop in grain, or one-fourth in cotton. At the 1912 meeting, however, this action was rescinded and the matter left to the discretion of the county organizations. The success of a tenant movement in the South will find its greatest obstacle in the high proportion of negro tenants, who

are not capable of effective organization. Where the majority of the farmers of a state are tenants and at the same time voters, it would seem possible that political action might be taken by which the speculative value of land would be reduced. That this would reduce rents is another question, tho it might result in larger ownership of land by farmers.

Unquestionably, the greatest evils of tenancy center about the fact of frequent, almost constant, moving from farm to farm. In the South about half the tenants move every year. The average period of occupancy by tenants is therefore but a very few years. In the North the same condition predominates, tho not in a form so exaggerated. Home and neighborhood ties, interest in schools, in organizations, or in any community affairs can hardly be expected of people who are almost destined to sever their connections with a given community and move to another within a year or two. For these undesirable conditions a favorite remedy is the long lease. No doubt the longer lease would carry with it certain desirable results. It is, however, not easy to comprehend how the long lease is to be put into effect where landowners stand ever ready to sell their land. Again, if landlord and tenant cannot agree to continue from year to year the arrangements of a short lease, it is questionable whether or not they would be able to enter into an agreement for five or eight years and carry out the contract in a way satisfactory to both. England is pointed out frequently as the splendid example of the land of the long lease. It is true that the tenure of the tenant is usually secure; but, contrary to the prevalent notion, the lease is in most instances a short one. The landlord finds a suitable tenant and keeps him almost indefinitely, — often a lifetime. But in England very little

land is for sale, and few tenants hope to become landowners. In America the greater number of farms are for sale, and the majority of tenants acquire land ownership sooner or later. During this stage of frequent sales of farms, the long lease will not be viewed with favor by the landowner. Neither must it be taken for granted that the tenant will always take kindly to the longer contract.

An impoverished soil and an impoverished people will result from a continuation of the present unstable conditions in the matter of tenancy. There are, no doubt, counteracting forces. A slackening in the advance in land values will make for stability in ownership and a better landowner class. Education concerning the nature of soil and crops will improve the tenants as well as other farmers. Better organizations through which to effect the marketing of farm products will encourage farmers, including the tenant. A better system of farm credit will make the acquisition of land easier. This seems to be the effect in Europe, notwithstanding the tendency of better credit to raise the prices of land. Better schools and better roads, — in fact, better rural conditions of every sort, — will stimulate a desire to own land and keep the farm people on the farms. The need for a plan by which the young farmer can become a landowner, and also a plan under which the tenant system can be made tolerable, are beyond doubt among the greatest needs of American agriculture, and especially of the South. No ready made program suggests itself; the remedy will undoubtedly be one of many ingredients. Thus far we are just beginning to gain a sufficient knowledge of the case to admit an intelligent diagnosis.

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